

John works with the entire MDC team to set strategy, shape our portfolio of work, and engage with partners and the public around the urgent challenge of eliminating disparities to build a South where all people can thrive.

Before coming to MDC in 2020, John held various leadership roles in efforts to promote equity, access, and inclusion at the state, national, and international level. Most recently he was Vice President of the Aspen Global Leadership Network at the Aspen Institute, where he mobilized the more than 3,000 Fellows around the world to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant economic effects.

A constitutional scholar and practicing attorney, John served in the Obama Administration as deputy general counsel for the White House Office of Management and Budget and general counsel for the U.S. Agency for International Development. After leaving government service, he joined Prisma Health as an executive and led collaborative, evidence-based efforts to promote health innovation, access, and equity in South Carolina's largest private-sector employer. While serving in this role, Simpkins facilitated community conversations throughout the Upstate on racial equity in healthcare, housing, and education.

John grew up and attended public schools in Lexington, S.C. After beginning his legal career in Washington, D.C, he returned to his home state as a faculty member in political science and Associate Director of the Richard Riley Institute at Furman University, where he focused on youth leadership, public school education practice and policy, and diversity programming for community and business leaders. He also was an assistant professor and director of diversity initiatives at the Charleston School of Law.

“The South belongs to all of us, and it matters a great deal to me. Through the work of MDC and our community partners throughout the region, we seek to be a model not just for the South, but for the rest of the country, and perhaps the rest of the world.”

Simpkins received his AB in government from Harvard College and a JD and LLM in international and comparative law from Duke University School of Law. He is a Senior Lecturer at Duke Law School and is a member of the Liberty Fellowship, a program in the Aspen Global Leadership Network dedicated to moving South Carolina forward.